

WANDERERS HELD BY ALAN'S 'BULLET'

BY adapting themselves better to a hard and bumpy ground, Wycombe Wanderers seemed to be heading for both Isthmian League points at Granleigh Road on Saturday. Then, with only five minutes remaining, full-back Alan Rowbottom picked up a clearance from a corner and blasted a glorious 30-yard drive wide of goalkeeper John Maskell to earn Leytonstone a share of the spoils.

The shot itself was worth a point and it made the 1-1 scoreline just about right.

Both sides had tried to play constructive football but the alien conditions made it extremely difficult. The ground at Granleigh Road is very open and the strong wind and sun had made it bone hard and even dusty in places. Hence the bounce was always unpredictable and mistakes were common.

Indeed, it was an error by massive centre-half Mike Smith that gave Wanderers their goal after 15 minutes. Poor Smith must have been relieved when Rowbottom snatched his equaliser later on. Playing for Ealing last season, Smith gave away no less than three penalties, all converted by John Delaney, in Wycombe's 4-0 win at Southbury Road. The Blues seem to be something of a bogey to him!

There is no doubt that Wycombe weren't at their best on Saturday but nevertheless a point at Leytonstone is never easy to come by. The Stones are now knitting into a useful side and

could well be a force to be recognised again next term.

They were weakened by the omission of centre back John Charles on Saturday, out with a broken toe. Ironically, Alan Rowbottom was also only brought in at the last minute for the injured Bob Hames.

Wanderers brought back Tony Horsemann to the forward line after his two goals in midweek, Mick Holifield standing down.

For the first 15 minutes the visitors looked in a charitable mood and had the Leytonstone strikers beaten on their toes they could well have taken an early lead. In only the second minute top scorer John Bull latched onto Dave Bullock's poor pass back and hammered in a shot at Maskell but the 'keeper parried the effort well.

Using veteran Brian Harvey to set up their raids from the flank, the Stones pressed hard early on

and gave the Wycombe defence quite a testing. It was against the run of play that they took the lead after a quarter of an hour.

Derek Gamblin was the man who laid on the goal with an astute through ball. Smith came across to clear but allowed the ball to go through to goalkeeper Tony Mackie. What Smith didn't see was Brian Langfield coming in on the blind side. Brian raced on and managed to get his boot to the ball and clip it into the net from eight yards.

The breakthrough proved a tonic for Wycombe who began to play with more confidence. Mackie had to be alert to cut out a dangerous cross from Horsemann after a neat build up from midfield to the by-line.

But Leytonstone didn't take

long to retaliate and only poor finishing robbed them of an early equaliser after 21 minutes. Ray Richards, receiving Harvey's

cross, vollied into the side netting from close in and then ten minutes later, Richards laid on a great chance for Bill Ratty.

Overlapping from midfield, Richards crossed well to the dangerously unmarked Ratty who powered a header onto the underside of the crossbar only for Bill to blaze the rebound over the top from inside the six yard box.

With most of the play being fought out in midfield, where the consistent Williams and Pritchard again stood out, attacks were few and far between. Needing time to control the ball on the hard ground, Wycombe found it hard to set up their normal trials of accurate passing and plumped for the long ball down the middle tactic, which looked like paying off.

But in the 40th minute they suffered a setback when Dave Bullock was hurt in going up for a high ball with Harvey. The injury

looked serious when Bullock was led off with a cut head, but he came on bravely for the rest of the half and played with a sponge in his hand for the remainder of the match.

Wanderers started the second period with a bang and after only a few minutes Amos outjumped Mackie right on the edge of the box but with the keeper stranded, Amos couldn't get a shot in on the open goal.

The pressure didn't last, however, and they were never able to gain total command. Leytonstone were always threatening and Ratty came within inches of making it 1-1 when he just failed to get a touch to Harvey's low cross.

The action was back with Wycombe after 67 minutes when Horsemann nipped round Smith but placed his shot straight at Mackie from 15 yards out. Two minutes later Alan Game streaked

through onto Pritchard's pass but hit the ball into the side netting.

In the 75th minute only a great save from Maskell kept Wanderers ahead. Collecting a weak clearance Richards sent a drive racing to the top corner of the net only for Maskell to fling himself full length and tip the ball around the post for a corner.

In the last quarter of the match, Wanderers seemed to be coasting home comfortably. There were few problems at the back thanks to John Delaney, who gave Bull a daunting afternoon.

His secret was always being first to the ball. Whereas many of the Stones forwards waited for the pass to come, Delaney made sure he was first every time.

Then, with five minutes left, the home side won a corner on the left. The ball was cleared out to Rowbottom, 30 yards out. Taking careful aim he let fly with a tremendous shot which left Maskell groping in thin air as it sped home.

In the last couple of minutes Wanderers had a strong appeal for handball turned down by referee Mahoney, who was in no position to see the offence. A winner at that stage for either side would hardly have been justice.

LEYTONSTONE: A. Mackie; L. Tilley, W. Rattay, M. Smith, A. Rowbottom; R. Richards, J. Smith, H. Page; J. Bill, M. Smith, B. Harvey. Sub: D. Phillips (not used).

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; D. Gamblin, D. Bullock, J. Delaney, P. Birdseye, R. Williams, A. Game, S. Pritchard; A. Horsemann, A. Amos, B. Langfield. Sub: I. Rundle (not used).

Referee: D. B. Mahoney (Croydon). **Half-time:** 0-1. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe - Langfield (1B), Leytonstone - Rowbottom (R5).